

# Marching Orders

by Warren Wiersbe

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*Jesus gives his followers the commission to make disciples of all nations, baptize them, and teach them to observe all things he has commanded.*

**Duration:** 38:23

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:18

**Topics:** "Great Commission", "Inclusive Church"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the presence of God with the church and the importance of sharing the Gospel. He highlights the need for financial support to reach billions of people without access to the Gospel. The speaker also emphasizes the inclusivity of the Church, stating that it is for all people regardless of race, culture, or background. He then discusses the authority and obligation of believers to follow God's orders and make disciples. The sermon also touches on the rebellion against Jesus as the King and his eventual retirement to teach his disciples about the cross.

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## Transcript

We open the Word of God to the Gospel of Matthew, the 28th chapter, and I shall read verses 1 to 10 and verses 16 to 20. In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher. And, behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it.

His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow, and for fear of him the keepers did shake and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not, for I know that ye seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen as he said.

Come, see the place where the Lord lay, and go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead. And, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee. There shall ye see him.

Lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy, and did run to bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail! And they came and held him by the feet and worshipped him.

Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid. Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me. Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.

And when they saw him, they worshipped him. But some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke unto them, saying, All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age. Amen.

And he is with us even today. Each of the first five books of the New Testament has in it some kind of marching orders for the church. This congregation is made up of serious Bible students, and so I don't have to point out all the references to you.

But some of you may not know this, that at the end of Matthew and Mark and Luke, in John chapter 20 and in Acts chapter 1, our Lord gives us some orders. And these orders were given to believers. Our Lord did not give these commissions to some ethereal, abstract body that someone calls the Church, capital C. These orders were given to real, live people, and they were carried out throughout the book of Acts by local assemblies of believers.

The Bible calls them churches. I fear that we evangelicals have tried to avoid many responsibilities by talking about the Church, His body, instead of our Church here on earth. Now, there is such a concept in the Bible as the body of Christ.

All believers, from Pentecost until the rapture, who make up this marvelous body. But that group never meets. That group has never won a soul.

That group has never observed the Lord's Supper. That group has never built a hospital. That is a concept in the heart and mind of God.

Jesus said, I will build my church. But you cannot build the Church, capital C, unless you are building the Church local. And let's not be shying away from our responsibilities and privileges.

I recall a pastor friend of mine calling me one day and saying, I just had an interesting experience. I said, tell me about it. Well, he said, a freelance missionary stopped by to get some money off of me from our church.

He said, our church doesn't support freelance people. We want to be sure they're a part of some good, solid organization. And so I told him I couldn't give him any money.

He became angry and he said, well, this isn't the church anyway. The invisible church is the true church. I said, what did you say? He said, I suggested that he get some invisible money from the invisible church.

At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, our Lord is in a mountain in Galilee and he has with him his 11 disciples plus. I firmly believe that the 500 brethren that Paul talks about in Corinthians were a part of this scene. Here's a great host of believers and our Lord is about to ascend up to heaven and he says to them, all authority is given unto me in heaven and on earth.

Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age. Amen.

That's a rather overwhelming statement. I'm overwhelmed by the universals that are in it, all authority, all nations, all things, all ways. That's an overwhelming thing.

I'm overwhelmed by the fact that he identifies us with the Trinity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And I'm overwhelmed by the fact that he's telling me here that I'm involved in something much bigger than myself, much bigger than even the work of a local church. We're involved in something that touches the whole world.

Does it bother anybody today that two and four-tenths billion people in this world are without a visible church or a Christian witness in their midst? Two and four-tenths billion people. We have enough gospel in the city of Chicago to save the whole world. I'm interested in finding out from this commission in Matthew chapter 28, verses 18 to 20, what is really involved in the mandate the Lord has given to us.

And as I see it, there are three basic factors that are involved in this commission. There is an authority, verse 18. There is an activity, verses 19 and the first part of 20.

And there is an ability, the end of verse 20. Now if we as individual believers and as a local church will just lay hold of these three factors, the thing will happen to us that happened to the church in the book of Acts. Factor number one, there is the factor of an authority.

All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Now Matthew is the gospel of the King. You know that.

When you turn the page from Malachi to Matthew, you move into the throne room. Where is he that is born King of the Jews? As you read Matthew's gospel, written primarily for Jewish readers, you find Matthew putting together the story of the King. In the first 10 chapters, you have the revelation of the King.

The Lord Jesus Christ is presented and you have his person presented in the first four chapters. And then you have his principles presented in chapters 5, 6, and 7, the Sermon on the Mount. And then you have his power presented in 8, 9, and 10.

When you read the first 10 chapters of Matthew, your eyes open wide, your mouth drops open and you say, here is the King. The Old Testament scriptures tell me he is the King, chapter 1. The Gentiles tell me he is the King, chapter 2. God the Father speaks from heaven and God the Spirit comes down like a dove and says, here is the King, chapter 3. Satan even says he is the King in chapter 4. Here is the King and here is the King's message, the kind of a kingdom he wants to establish in this world. And here is the King's power.

And so you read those first 10 chapters and say, I've come face to face with the revelation of the King. Jesus is the King. But Matthew doesn't stop.

You'd think that the next step would be for all the people to fall at Jesus' feet and say, here's the King, we're going to receive him. But in 11 through 13, Matthew says, no, you have the rebellion against the King. And the religious leaders rebel and begin to criticize and find fault.

And so in 14 through 20, you have the retirement of the King. The King takes his court, his disciples, and goes off in retirement to teach them about the cross. And three times in that section, he says, now men, I'm going to Jerusalem to die.

I won't look much like a king. They'll mock me, they'll scourge me, they'll put a crown of thorns on my head, a scepter in my hand, a robe on my body, and they'll mock my kingship. But I want you to remember, I'm the King.

In 21 through 27, you have the rejection of the King. He marches into Jerusalem just the way Zechariah said he would. He presents himself as the King and the people say, we have no king but Caesar.

We will not have this man to reign over us. And so they crucified the King. But the story doesn't stop there.

When Matthew got to the end of chapter 27, he didn't say, and thus ends the life of a good godly man. Put his pen down. Oh, no.

He moved into chapter 28, the resurrection of the King. And Jesus Christ arose from the dead. And now he is able to stand before more than 500 of his followers and say, I am the King.

All authority is given to me in heaven and on earth. Matthew is the gospel of the King. It's a book of authority.

So often our authorized translation gives us the word power. There's a difference between power and authority. If I walk out of my house holding onto a rifle that has ammunition in it, I've got power.

But I haven't got any authority. Nobody gave me the authority to go around with a rifle shooting people. Now, Jesus Christ does have power.

He's God. Omnipotent. But Jesus Christ has authority.

He has been vested with all authority. When you read Matthew's gospel, you run right up against his authority. He finished preaching the Sermon on the Mount and the people were amazed at what he taught because he taught them as one that had authority.

Chapter 8 of the gospel of Matthew, the Lord Jesus Christ had authority to heal. In chapter 9, he astounded them by saying he had the authority to forgive sins. Chapter 10, he calls his disciples and he gives them authority over Satan.

And when you get to the end of this book, he says, not only do I have authority to teach and authority to heal and authority to forgive sins and authority over Satan, I have all authority. That's what Paul meant when he wrote to the Ephesians and said, get your eyes off of the little, midget, picayunish circumstances of life and get your eyes up there in the heavenlies where he has ascended far above all authority and every name that is named. Matthew is the book of authority.

Now, what does this mean to us? He has authority and he wants to exercise that authority through us. He is the head of the church and we are the members of the body. And just as my head physically has authority over the members of my body, so the head of the church, Jesus, has authority over the members of his body.

And when those people, those 500 plus brethren heard Jesus say, all authority is given to me, now you do something, they knew that they were men and women under orders. Would it shock you if I told you that Matthew 28, 18 through 20, is not what makes Christianity a missionary faith? If these verses had never been written, Christianity would still be a missionary faith. I was witnessing one day to a man who belonged to a different faith and he said, you know, the trouble with you Christians is you're always proselytizing.

I said, no, proselytizing is a different thing from sharing the witness that we have. He said, well, the faith I belong to, we don't bother anybody else. We let them believe as they believe because we respect their belief.

I said, I appreciate the fact that you respect other people's belief, but you must remember this, the very nature of the Christian faith demands that we reach out. You see, that's the nature of God. God is a missionary.

God is always sharing. He built a universe that is based on sharing. By nature, God is love and love has to give.

And so the God that we worship is a God who believes in sharing. The very nature of the gospel demands that we share. The gospel is not an exclusive message for an elite people.

The gospel is an inclusive message for all people. And the very nature of the gospel demands that we share it. The very nature of the church demands it.

The church is not for white people only, or educated people only, or wealthy people only, or Westerners only. The beautiful thing about the church, and this impresses me every Sunday as I stand here at the Moody Church and look out at people from so many different backgrounds, different races, cultures. The very nature of the church is that we're all one in Jesus Christ.

There's nothing exclusive about the church. And the church can never say to anyone, you can't be a part of this. All men are lost, and all men need to trust Jesus Christ, and the church extends its arms to all men.

There is an authority. That means that you and I are under obligation. I can't use my time any way I want to use it.

I'm under orders. So are you. I can't spend my money any way I want to.

I'm under orders, and so are you. I can't do with my talents and gifts and abilities whatever I want to do. I'm under orders, and so are you.

There is an authority. Now this commission involves not only the factor of an authority, but it involves the factor of an activity. In verse 19, many of you are deep students of the word, and some of you sit right now holding a Greek New Testament in front of you.

And if you are, you've recognized the fact that the word go in the original text is not an imperative. It's not a commandment. There is only one commandment in verses 19 and 20.

Did you know that? There's only one commandment. It's not go. The commandment in verses 19 and 20 is make disciples.

Now it's translated teach all nations, but that word teach means make disciples. While you are going, it's a present participle, while you are going, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit. Now that identifies them with a local church.

There are many fine organizations in this world who are observing and obeying this commission one-third of the way. They're making disciples. Some are obeying it two-thirds of the way.

They're teaching them. It takes a local church to obey it three-thirds of the way, baptizing them. I'm glad that some of the para-church organizations have rediscovered the church, that the church is a divine institution of God.

And while we thank the Lord for every extra church organization and for every ministry, we recognize the fact that this commission involves making disciples, identifying them with a local body of believers, baptizing them, teaching them so they can go out and repeat the process. What is the emphasis in verse 19? It's not in go. I am so tired of hearing people say, well, God never called me to go.

God didn't call them to go. He said, while you're going, while you're going to the store, while you're going on vacation, while you're going on the bus, while you're going on the road in your truck, wherever you're going, make some disciples. That's what they did in the book of Acts.

They got chased out of Jerusalem. They said, well, I guess we can't minister anymore. No.

While they were going, they made disciples. The emphasis in the New Testament is not on an elite group of specialists who are our substitutes and we pay the bills. The emphasis in the New Testament is on the entire church, wherever they are, in the supermarket, in the parking lot, in the hospital, winning people to Jesus Christ.

That verb in verse 19 is not an imperative, it's a participle and so is baptize and so is teach. So you are making disciples, make disciples while you're going and having made them, you baptize them and you teach them. We don't find much of an emphasis these days about making disciples.

He doesn't say make converts. He said, make disciples. You know what a disciple is? A disciple, if you want a good modern day equivalent of the word disciple, I'll give it to you.

It's the word apprentice. Apprentice. What is an apprentice? I was chatting recently with a man who was talking about the possibility of his son going into one of the trades and the man said, I told my son that he'd better sign up for the full six years and finish it.

An apprentice is someone who dedicates himself to a trained leader and learns by watching and by doing. Our Lord's disciples were apprentices. He said, now man, I'm going to sign you up for three years and during these three years, I want you to live with me, watch me, listen to me, learn from me, and I'm going to send you out and you're going to do it and you're going to come back and you're going to say, we made this mistake.

Okay, I'll teach you some more. You see, Jesus didn't teach his disciples by giving him lectures only. Many times he took them off by themselves and he did lecture to them about the scriptures.

Then he sent them out to do the job. They'd come back in bruised, disappointed. Sometimes he'd say, okay, man, you've learned something.

I want to teach you some more. That's what the church is all about. You see, if you are a growing Christian, you ought to be sharing that growing with somebody else.

If God has done some things in your life, then you ought to be sharing that with somebody else. The emphasis in the book of Acts is on discipleship. 270 times in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts, you'll find the word disciples.

270 times. We talk about results. We talk about converts.

We talk about decisions. The New Testament talks about disciples. Not just someone who raised a hand or signed a card or walked an aisle.

Someone who said, I am an apprentice. I'm going to learn. That's what church is all about.

A disciple has to pay a price. I suppose that's the reason we don't like to have too much discipleship going on because whoever's doing the discipling has to pay a price. We sit down with younger Christians or with people who are growing, and we spend time with them.

We try to answer questions. We try to lead them into a deeper life. It takes time.

It's agonizing. It means a lot of prayer. That's what has to be done.

Are you discipling anybody? You say, well, the pastors are supposed to do that. Well, we do, but are you discipling anybody? That's what a discipler is. One who takes a new believer, makes an apprentice out of him, and then he becomes a trainer himself.

There's a price to pay, but there's a bigger price to pay not to disciple. We are going to be suffering in the next years. Now, remember that you heard it here.

The church across America is going to be suffering in the next years from a lot of statistics, but not a great many disciples. There is an activity making disciples. Would it shock you if I told you the results of a recent survey? Now, I know there are three kinds of lies, white lies, black lies, and statistics, but these statistics happen to come from a very reputable firm and a Christian organization, and I believe they are true.

I recently saw some statistics on where church growth comes from. If a church really is growing, where does it really come from? And the consequence of the study was this, that 70 to 80 percent of the church's growth comes from friends sharing with friends and relatives sharing with relatives. A very small percentage comes as the result of trained elite people doing the job.

Now, we're not against that. We are glad that here at Moody Church we have several groups that are specially trained in discipleship and evangelism, and they go out to win people, but they alone can't do the job. Seventy to eighty percent of church growth comes from you talking to your friends and inviting them, you witnessing to your relatives and inviting them.

There is an authority. We've been told what to do. There is an activity.

We've been told what it is we're supposed to do, make disciples. Finally, there is an ability. When I face these verses, I feel very inadequate, very insufficient.

I was reading one of Spurgeon's sermons the other day, and there in the midst of that sermon the great Charles Haddon Spurgeon said to his congregation of some 5,000 or 6,000 people, God has called me to do an impossible thing. I said, is there anything impossible for Spurgeon? And I went on to read. He said, it is impossible for me to pastor this church.

No one man, he said, can pastor 6,000 people. I read these verses and I say, Lord, it's impossible for me to go into all nations. It just can't be done.

It's impossible for the Moody Church to go into all nations. It just can't be done. One of the hymns we sang recently so beautifully reminds us that we today have tools of communication that Paul never had, and yet Paul did a better job without them than we're doing with them.

Paul didn't have a printing press. Paul didn't have shortwave radio. Paul did not have cassettes or TV or satellites off of which you could bounce the message.

We do. What is this ability? Lo, I am with you always even unto, let me change the next word, even unto the consummation of the age. There's a difference between an end and a consummation.

A consummation means the drawing together of all the loose ends to one purpose. The difference between a consummation and an end is the difference between taking off in your automobile and having an accident and being in the hospital. That's an end.

Or getting to your destination. That's a consummation. Now this encourages me.

The gospel of Matthew begins with His name is Emmanuel, God with us. It ends with Lo, I am with you always. And in between those two statements, He showed that He was with us.

Now we have Him with us today. The church acts as though they were left orphans. He's with us as we pray.

Our faith promise goal for this month is \$150,000. Too much for any one of us. Certainly opportunity for all of us.

But when you think of 2 and 4 tenths billion people without any visible church or any resident witness of the gospel, what in the world is \$150,000 going to do? That's like trying to stop Niagara with a wet Kleenex. But He says, Lo, I am with you. One British boy, homesick and lonely, went to inland China.

One boy, no one promising to support him. Trusting God. And J. Hudson Taylor saw thousands come to Christ because God was with him.

See, our trouble is we look at our resources the way Philip did. There were 5,000 hungry people. Here were a few loaves and a few fish.

What are these among so many? Nothing. Nothing. The best that the committee could have done was to give everybody a sniff.

But you put them in the hands of Jesus and they become something. And some dear widow at Moody Church says, Pastor, I can't give a great deal of money, but I'm going to give what I can sacrificially. And you put it in Jesus' hands.

He says, I'm with you. And he multiplies that. Now don't ask me how he does it, but he does it.

The trouble is so many of the saints will not let the Lord perform His ability in their lives. I recall reading about a young Christian who had so much to do and he said to his pastor, I have too much responsibility. The pastor said, that's a good word.

You know what responsibility is? No. What is it? It's our response to His ability. There's no reason in all the world why the Moody Church couldn't be giving much more than that.

Toward reaching two and four tenths billion people who don't have a resident church or a visible witness where they are. And so he gives us an ability. I am with you.

He's with us in His person. And He's with us in prayer. He's with us in His power.

And He's with us in His promise. He's with us. And if God be for us, who can be against us? And we're not going to be like those Old Testament spies who saw the walls and saw the cities and saw the giants and couldn't see God.

We're going to be like the Apostle Paul who said, I must see Rome also. I'm going to come to Rome and turn Rome upside down. And he did.

The thing that interests me about verse 20 is that he has a program. I'm with you always, even unto the consummation of the age. He's the Lord of history.

He isn't just the Lord of salvation, the Lord of the church. He's the Lord of history. He said, I know what I'm doing.

I'm in charge of the rise and the fall of nations and empires. I know what's going on. I set the boundaries of history.

And what is going on in history is for my church. Oh, if we could only once realize that the church actually controls history. Through our praying and through our giving and through our serving, we become the vehicles of God for the moving of history very unwillingly.

John Wesley went to a religious meeting on Aldersgate Street and he got converted and he changed history. And so there is an authority. Jesus says, I have all authority.

There'll be no arguments. There'll be no debates. I am the Lord.

And there is an activity, make disciples. Wherever you go, make disciples, build them up, teach them, identify them with the church and teach them so they can go out and make disciples. And there is an ability.

I'm with you. To the very consummation of the age. I read a story about Campbell Morgan the other day that I'd never read before.

I thought I'd read everything in print about Campbell Morgan, but there's always something new to learn. He said in his early days, he used to go read the Bible every Saturday evening to two blind ladies. And he was reading to them the gospel of Matthew.

And he came to the last verse and he read to these ladies, lo, I am with you always, even under the end of the age. Amen. And he paused and he said, isn't that a wonderful promise? And he said, the one lady looked at him, just snapped her head and looked at him and said, young man, that is not a promise.

It is a fact. And it is a fact. He's with us.

Are we with him? Is your budget with him? Your use of time? Are the activities of the Moody church with him? He's with us. And if we're with him, we're going to get the job done. If we obey the authority, if we accomplish the activity, if we depend on the ability, we'll get our share of the job done.

We can't do it all, but we'll get our share of the job done. And that church will get their share of the job done. And that group will get their share of the job done.

And then one day he'll pull all the pieces together under the consummation of the age. And I trust that we'll not have to stand ashamed before him because we didn't do our part of the job. All authority, all nations.

I am with you always. Heavenly father, forgive us for taking for granted that which is so desperately needed by most of the world. Forgive us for wasting time and money and energy on fringe activities that do not contribute to the most important activity, making disciples, winning and building people.

I pray lord that you will get our priorities straight in our own lives, in our homes and in our church, lest we be found not with you. I pray oh god, begin a work in our hearts so that through us individually and as a church, you might begin to accomplish more and more of the thing that is on your heart, the winning of a lost world. Begin in us today.

For Jesus sake. Amen.

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